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SUBJECT: SECOND MALAGASY CABINET RESHUFFLE IN 2007

REF: A) ANTANANARIVO 1063 AND PREVIOUS

B) ANTANANARIVO 84

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11. (U) SUMMARY: President Marc Ravalomanana's October 27 cabinet reshuffle, the second of his current term in office, had few significant changes but portends some improvement in overall governance. Only three of the 19 Cabinet members are new to the government. Seven former ministers were dropped from the list, two of whom will serve in the National Assembly (REF A). The new cabinet is slightly smaller, as several ministries were regrouped. The major surprise was the President designating a woman (and a civilian) as Minister of Defense. His priorities for the new Cabinet include: tripling food production; renewing public faith in a "clean" judiciary; and strengthening public security. END SUMMARY.

THE NEW LINE-UP

12. (U) Of the 19 Cabinet members designated on October 27, only three are new to the government. Seven members were completely dropped from the list (the former Ministers of Defense, Justice, Sports, Environment, and Mining, the Vice-Minister of Agriculture, and the State Secretary of Culture), while there were four significant personnel shifts. The Ministers of Education and Finance swapped positions, while the former Minister of Energy received a face-saving demotion to lead the regrouped Ministry of Sports, Culture and Leisure. The former Vice-Minister of Education is now the Minister of Defense - the first woman ever (and the second civilian) to hold this position. The former Minister of Economy, Commerce, Planning, and Private Sector moved over to head the regrouped Ministry of Environment, Forestry, Water, and Tourism. The Ministries of Energy and Mining, separated in the January cabinet shuffle, remerged as one single entity, as did the Ministries of Sports, Culture and Leisure. In a break with tradition that will surely engender political blowback, 17 of the 19 members hail from around the capital, with the other two coming from Diego Suarez in the north; none of the 20 other regions are represented in the new cabinet. Three of the cabinet members are now women, no change from the old government.

13. (U) The new line-up is as follows:

a) Concurrently Prime Minister and Minister of Interior General Charles Rabemananjara (Retained);

b) Minister of Decentralization and Territorial Distribution Yvan

Randriasandratiniony (Retained. This is the only ministry that reports directly to the President; all others report to the Prime Minister.);

c) Minister of Foreign Affairs General Marcel Ranjeva (Retained);

d) Minister of National Defense Cecile Marie Ange Manorohanta (Formerly Vice-Minister of Education);

e) Minister of Justice Bakolalao Ramanandraibe Ranaivoharivony (New);

f) Minister of Agriculture, Breeding and Fishing Marius Ratolojanahary (Retained);

g) Minister of National Education and Scientific Research Benjamin Radavidson Andriamparany (Formerly Minister of Finance and Budget);

h) Minister of Public Works and Meteorology Roland Randriamampionona (Retained);

i) Minister of Health and Family Planning Jean Louis Robinson (Retained);

j) Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Ivohasina Razafimahefa (New);

k) Minister of Finance and Budget Haja Nirina Razafinjatovo (Formerly Minister of National Education and Scientific Research);

l) Minister of Environment, Water, Forest and Tourism Harison Edmond Randriarimanana (Formerly Minister of Economy, Commerce, Planning and Private Sector);

m) Minister of Energy and Mining Elise Razaka (New);

n) Minister of Civil Services, Labor and Social Law Jacky Mahafaly Tsianidopy (Retained);

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o) Minister of Telecommunications, Post, and Communications Bruno Ramaroson Andriatavison (Retained);

p) Minister of Transport Julien Ravelonarivo Laporte (Retained, but lost Tourism portfolio);

q) Minister of Sports, Culture and Hobbies Patrick Ramiaramanana (Formerly Minister of Energy);

r) Vice-Minister of Health Marie Perline Rahatanirina (Retained);

s) State Secretary for Public Security Desire Rasolofomanana (Retained).

OUT WITH THE OLD, IN WITH THE NEW

14. (U) Of the six ministers in the former cabinet who won seats in the September National Assembly elections, four returned to keep their cabinet positions. Back-up candidates will take over their seats in the Assembly. The former Ministers of Mining and Environment will serve in the National Assembly from now on.

15. (U) The first of the three new players, Ivohasina Razafimahefa, 34 years old, left his position as Secretary General of the Madagascar Action Plan (MAP) in the President's Office to be the new Minister of Economy, Trade, and Industry. One of the Embassy's best contacts at the Presidency, he speaks fluent French, English and Japanese. Bakolalao Ramanandraibe Ranaivoharivony, the new Minister of Justice, was most recently the President of the Committee for the Safeguard of Integrity (CSI), the policy arm of the government's anti-corruption agency BIANCO. The Minister of Energy and Mining in President Ravalomanana's first cabinet in 2002, Elise Razaka returns

to hold the same position. He was most recently the Director General of OMNIS, the petroleum parastatal and regulatory body.

THE PRESIDENT SETS PRIORITIES

16. (U) The President outlined three priorities in the first Cabinet meeting following the reshuffle: tripling food production, renewing the faith of the public, investors and donors in a "clean" judiciary, and strengthening public security. In a symbolic move to hold ministries more accountable, each minister had to sign a commitment to accomplish their new job descriptions.

17. (U) In comments to the press following the reshuffle, President Ravalomanana claimed his decisions were based on a long-term vision for the country. Eschewing the normal considerations of regional balance, family/friend connections, and "fihavanana" (the Malagasy concept of harmony and consensus), he said he based his choices on competence and results. Calling his designation of a female Minister of Defense an example of Madagascar's need to modernize, he dared the ministers to accept public criticism and take action to bring about real change. He reassured those ministers dropped from the cabinet not to worry; he will find jobs for them somewhere in government.

18. (SBU) COMMENT: In radio call-in shows, some members of the public questioned why the President emphasizes change in every public discourse, but left his cabinet largely untouched. While the changes were minimal, Post sees the incremental designation of competent ministers falling under the overall theme set by the President for his second term: "results, results, results." Indeed, we also see those dismissed or demoted - at Environment, Justice, Mines, and Energy - as the weakest links of the previous government, and see the new Finance Minister as an improvement. The reshuffle met with little public reaction, save commentary on the controversial designation of the first female Minister of Defense. Some observers hope a civilian leader will finally clean up the rampant corruption in the Ministry of Defense and lack of discipline among the armed forces, while others worry a woman will be incapable of handling a "man's" portfolio. One contact observed Manorohanta may have an advantage in being unbiased with regard to the frequent rivalry between the Army and the Gendarmes, given she came from neither service. END COMMENT.

MARQUARDT